

Meeting the Requirements of Equality Legislation

A Fairer NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde 2013 – 2016

Briefing Paper:
Sensory Impairment

June 2013

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Demographics / Health Needs

Hearing impairment

In NHSGCC there is an estimated 13, 000 people who have severe to profound deafness. Within this group there are a number of Deaf people with British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language - 1400 in NHSGCC area, however it may be as high as 3000. It is important to remember that British Sign Language users do not have English as a first language.

It is difficult to estimate the number of people who are Deafblind. There is thought to be approximately 1000 Deafblind people in NHSGCC. Most of these people are not entirely deaf and blind, but may have a little sight and / or hearing.

Visual impairment

With regard to visual impairment, 41,400 people in NHSGCC have significant sight loss. Of these 8,500 are voluntarily registered as partially sighted or blind, however research indicates that as few as 23 - 38% of eligible people are registered.

By 2021, 40% of the population will be over 50. A significant proportion of sight loss is related to age: one in eight over-75s and one in three over-90s have serious sight loss.

Around 80% of people with a learning disability have some form of sight loss – often this sight loss is significant and in most cases was not previously detected.

Health needs – Hearing impairment

Access to health services is a key barrier to those with sensory impairment.

In GP Surgeries:

- 35% of Deaf and hard of hearing people had experienced difficulty communicating with their GP or nurse and 32% found it difficult to explain their health problems to their GP.
- 15% of Deaf and heard of hearing people said they avoid going to see their GP because of communication problems; this proportion doubles among British Sign Language (BSL) users.
- 28% of Deaf and hard of hearing people found it difficult to contact their GP surgery to get an appointment because of their hearing loss.

- 35% of Deaf and hard of hearing people had been left unclear about their condition because of communication problems with their GP or nurse.
- 33% of BSL users were either unsure about instructions for medication or had taken too much or too little of a medication because of a communication problem.
- 24% of patients had missed an appointment because of poor communication – such as not being able to hear staff calling out their name – 19% of whom missed more than five appointments.

In Hospitals:

- 42% of Deaf and hard of hearing people who had visited hospital (non-emergency) had found it difficult to communicate with NHS staff. This increased to 66% amongst BSL users
- 77% of BSL users who had visited hospital could not easily communicate with NHS staff. The proportion who had experienced difficulty was the same for both emergency visits and non-emergency overnight stays
- 70% of BSL users admitted to A&E units were not provided with a BSL/English interpreter to enable them to communicate.
- There is also an association between profound deafness and mental health. Forty five percent of those who are Deaf as compared to 25% of the general population are likely to experience mental ill health at some point in their lives.

Health needs – Visual impairment

- On average only 10% of all communications from health services to blind and partially sighted participants were received in their preferred reading format.
- 91 per cent (213 out of 223) of blind and partially sighted respondents thought they had a right to receive health information in a format they could read.
- Blind and partially sighted respondents reported a loss of autonomy and privacy regarding their experience of accessing health care information.
- The majority of blind and partially sighted respondents did not complain when information was received in an inappropriate format.
- Blind and partially sighted respondents reported difficulty identifying and using medication.
- Blind and partially sighted respondents reported difficulty experiencing health care due to a general lack of understanding of their additional needs.
- Blind and partially sighted respondents reported frequently relying on others to help them access health care information
- The effects of not receiving health information in a preferred reading format were reported to be largely buffered by carers and relatives.

Patient experience

A range of involvement work has been carried out by NHSGGC with those with sensory impairment.

Open meetings held with British Sign Language users indicated a significant level of negative experience for Deaf people in using NHSGGC services, either relating directly to interpreting provision or in relation to staff awareness of the communication and support needs of Deaf people. Participants described the general attitudes of staff within NHSGGC services as requiring improvement. Many of the participants at the discussion groups stated that NHSGGC needs to do much to improve its practice and sought reassurance that steps would be taken to make appropriate changes to how it addresses the needs of Deaf patients.

Focus groups with visually impaired people have highlighted three areas of concern:

- staff attitudes towards people who are visually impaired;
- staff awareness in relation to the needs of people who are visually impaired;
- lack of patient information in accessible formats.

Experience of discrimination

Discrimination against those with a sensory impairment takes many forms. This has been highlighted above. Access to service and information in a format which is usable is a common experience for people who are visually and / or hearing impaired. Poor communication with those who have a hearing impairment is common. From our 'Fairer NHSGGC' staff survey we know that 38% of our staff do not always book a British Sign Language interpreter for those who are BSL users and 32% would use a family member.

NHSGGC's Health Needs Assessment of Deaf and Deafblind communities can be viewed here http://www.equalitiesinhealth.org/public_html/disability_support_resources.html

Resources

NHSGGC has a range of policies and procedures in place to remove barriers from services. The Accessible Information Policy ensures information is provided in a format accessible to patients' individual needs. Each CH(C)P and each Acute Directorate has an Accessible Information Policy (AIP) Lead. Their role is to support their area to ensure information is provided to patients in a format they can access.

<http://www.staffnet.ggc.scot.nhs.uk/Info%20Centre/AIP/Pages/AccessibleInformationPortal.aspx>

Communication support is guaranteed through the NHSGGC Interpreting Policy.

<http://www.staffnet.ggc.scot.nhs.uk/Info%20Centre/InterpretingServices/Pages/InterpretingServices.aspx>

Our internal Interpreting Service provides interpreting for all patients who require it, financed centrally and not from service budgets.

An Assistance Dog Policy and Signage Policy promotes accessible way finding.

<http://www.staffnet.ggc.scot.nhs.uk/Human%20Resources/Learning%20and%20Education/Documents/NHS%20Greater%20Glasgow%20and%20Clyde%20Assistance%20Dog%20Policy.doc>

More information is available on the Equalities in Health website –

www.equality.scot.nhs.uk

Training

NHS staff can access an E-learning modules on sensory impairment on StaffNet –

<http://www.staffnet.ggc.scot.nhs.uk/Human%20Resources/Learning%20and%20Education/E-Learning/Pages/E-Learning%20Homepage.aspx>

Training e learning modules include visual and hearing impairment, accessible information training and working with an interpreter training.

Involvement

The key organisations to contact to involve those with hearing impairment are: Deaf Connections, Action on Hearing Loss, the British Deaf Association and the Scottish Council on Deafness. The Corporate Inequalities Team (CIT) has also set up a Deaf (BSL users) patient group to help drive change across the system.

The key organisations to contact to involve those with visual impairment are: Visibility, RNIB.

The key organisations to contact to involve those with dual sensory impairment are: Deafblind Scotland and Sense.

The CIT will organise an engagement session with those who are sensory impaired annually between 2013-15 so that NHSGGC service providers and planners can find out how to improve their services. Individual services can also do their own engagement activity where appropriate e.g. to find out how specific issues in the serviced can be addressed.

Activity to reduce discrimination

NHSGGC services should continue to implement the Accessible Information Policy to ensure those with sensory impairment have information in a format accessible to them. They should also ensure that those who require interpreting or communication support receive it as specified in the NHSGGC Interpreting and Communication Support Policy.

Acknowledgement

Scottish Council on Deafness and Royal National Institute of Blind People.

Briefing Papers – A Fairer NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

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